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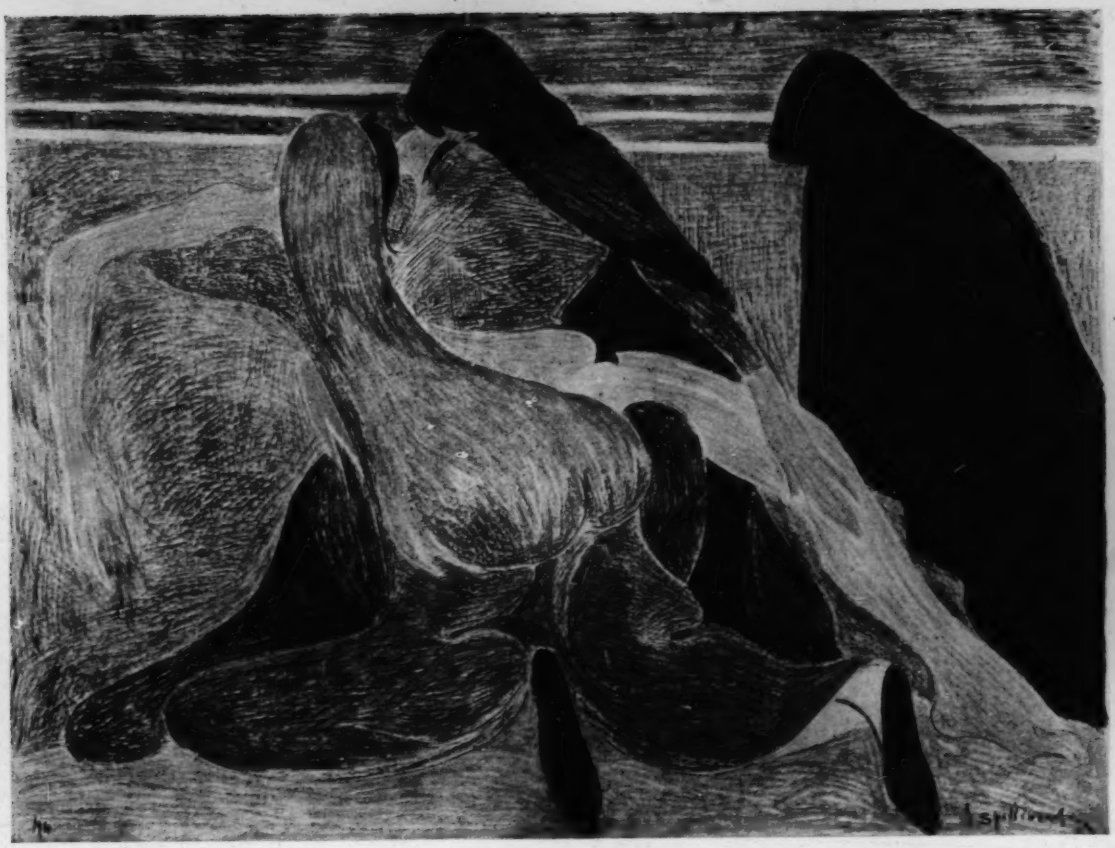

Autour de 1900:
L'Art Belge (1884-1918)

Groupe des XX
Ensor et les Symbolistes
Art Nouveau
Ecole de Laethem, etc

The Arts Council 1965

Cover: Léon Spilliaert, Pietà, 1910. Cat. No. 59

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Foreword

The last quarter of the nineteenth century was a crucial period in the development of modern art and saw the emergence of many of the movements and styles which were to come to maturity early in this century. The literary and artistic activity in Belgium during this period has great interest both because of the vital and diverse character of much of what was produced, and because of its importance in the wider context of European art. The work of some of the major artists is already well known in Britain; exhibitions of Ensor and Permeke have been held in London since the war and the architecture and design of Henry Van de Velde and Victor Horta are familiar to all those interested in the modern movement. This exhibition provides an opportunity to obtain a more general picture of these thirty years in the history of Belgian art.

The exhibition has been organised by the Ministry of Education and Culture, Brussels, within the terms of the Anglo-Belgian Cultural Convention. We are most grateful to Monsieur Van Lerberghe, Counsellor at the Ministry; to Monsieur Francis de Lulle, who was responsible for the detailed organisation of the exhibition until its last stages, and to Mademoiselle Eliane Sepulcre, both of the Ministry, who completed the arrangements and prepared the catalogue. Madame F.-C. Legrand, Keeper at the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, has written the illuminating introduction to the catalogue and we are much indebted to her.

Our very grateful thanks are due to all the private collectors and museums whose loans have made the exhibition possible and whose names are listed on page 31. We would also like to thank Mademoiselle Fernande van Haelewyck, Attaché at the Belgian Embassy in London, for her practical assistance.

GABRIEL WHITE,
Director of Art,
Arts Council of Great Britain

Belgian Art 1884 - 1918

By F.-C. Legrand, Keeper, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique

According to the Japanese, the age of a human being is to be counted, not from the date of his birth, but from the moment of conception. This wise tribute to the forces that are at work upon the embryo is even more to the point in the world of art. Each new movement, each change of course, is prepared slowly and laboriously in the shadows before it comes into the light of day. Accordingly, the dates that stand so conveniently in the margin of history mark off only the final happening of long-prepared events, when their true character has at last become visible. Later on, a halo forms round those privileged moments when isolated and tentative half-conscious gropings come out into the open to take their place in the story of mankind.

In 1884, the *Société des Indépendants* was founded in Paris and, in the same year and in the same spirit, *Les XX* was founded in Brussels, a revolutionary group up in arms against academic bodies and all conventional authority. *Les XX* were individualists, even anarchists. Deliberately they avoided formulating any common aesthetic programme, confining themselves to a practical aim to exhibit yearly and to invite the collaboration of the bold and independent spirits, the 'insurgents', of all the countries of Europe. Never was free trade put in practice more intelligently. All the innovators of the late nineteenth century came trooping to the exhibitions of *Les XX*, or at any rate were invited. The leading members of the group changed as time went on; there were resignations resulting from back-stairs quarrels, and younger elements recruited. Some of the names are now forgotten, but this movement of Belgian art continued to thrive. There were Ensor, Vogels, Van Rysselberghe, Khnopff, Finch, Lemmen, Degouve de Nuncques, Minne, Van de Velde – artists whom we have sought to recall in the present exhibition – as well as three foreigners, the Dutchman Toorop, and two Frenchmen, Rodin and Signac.

At the helm of this little vessel, Octave Maus, lawyer, journalist and art critic, and secretary of *Les XX*, combined opportunism with audacity, skill and perseverance, earning by his enthusiasm the nickname *Joyeux* bestowed on him by the musician Alberic Magnard. With Edmond Picard and Emile Verhaeren, the great Belgian poet, he was the driving force of a review, *L'Art Moderne*, which gave powerful support to new ideas. Encouraged by literary circles, particularly by the team of writers on *La Jeune Belgique*, Octave Maus from the outset associated the plastic arts with music and poetry. Everything that Belgium, and even Europe, considered in the van of intellectual progress was *ipso facto* taken up by *Les XX*.[1]

Running through these multiple activities, a new principle was asserting itself for the first time, the idea of an evolution inherent in modern art and giving it its vitality. 'The *Salon des XX*,' says Maus, 'is no more than an episode in the great periodical battle between new ideas and old ways of thinking, a battle that is always won by the younger side.'[2] At the same time, contrary and even antagonistic views within *Les XX* were always present during its ten years of activity. All along, it was in the throes of a constant intellectual ferment, all the more lively because it was perpetually running the gauntlet of public opinion, defiance of which was, of course, all part of the game.

It was within *Les XX* that Impressionism blossomed, though it must be added that Impressionism in Belgium included, besides a *pleinairisme* already present in Artan and in Boulenger, a host of individual contributions to the problem of vibrations of light. There was no Impressionist group as in France, but tendencies of the same nature expressed themselves in Belgium in many different ways. Participation by Monet and Renoir in the *Salon des XX* had little immediate influence, that of Whistler being at the time much stronger. In any case, the writers surrounding Maus had their eyes already turned elsewhere, the reactions against Impressionism attracting their attention. These were Divisionism, the various waves of Symbolism, and Art Nouveau. Thus the *vingtiste* group, though rather isolated in a town that was still somewhat provincial, provided an eloquent reflection of the artistic currents forming the sources of modern art.

The increasing importance of light can be traced like a path through the work of Henri de Braekeleer, who still belonged to the realist generation. As a matter of fact, at the start of his career, he adhered to a realism tempered with intimism, learnt from the minor Dutch masters of the seventeenth century. Then his palette grew lighter, his brush strokes became thicker and began to vibrate. Not that he ever ceased to express the texture of substances: objects are flooded with light, but china does not melt, leather remains leather, and materials show

[1] Madeleine Octave Maus, *Trente années de lutte pour l'art 1884–1914*, Brussels, 1926.

Le Groupe des XX et son temps, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique; Otterlo, Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, 17 February-31 May 1962 (preface by F.-C. Legrand).

[2] O. Maus, *Préambule au catalogue de la 6 ième exposition des XX*, 1889.

their fibres. Even when he paints little landscapes of sky and water on the banks of the Scheldt, he avoids the transformations exemplified by English painting.

On the other hand, for many other northern painters, Turner was the true initiator of the painting of light like fairy dust, the first to celebrate the marriage of sea and sky. When Ensor reacted against the realist principles controlling French Impressionism, the example of Turner showed him the way. For Ensor, light is a means and not an end. It is the pliable instrument of his subjectivity; not a natural phenomenon but a bearer of dreams, a field of consolation on which, profoundly wounded by the lack of understanding of his fellows, Ensor sought intoxication and forgetfulness. At the height of his exaltation, light became for him incarnate in the immaterial person of Christ. It drew a halo round an apparition. This Christ, persecuted yet triumphant, is the projection of his own secret self.

Ensor, at the age of twenty-four, was the leading figure amongst a group which included Toorop, Van Strydonck, Finch, Schlobach, and even Vogels, but, within a few years, he was eclipsed by others. Anyone who overshadowed him inspired his hostility. We thus see him in 1886 bitterly opposing the admission of Whistler as a member of *Les XX*. On that occasion he wrote: 'Why admit Whistler? His painting is already mouldy and stuffy. If you think he will attract the public, remember that Mr Whistler's reputation is, like ours, of no account in the grocer's shop, where they think him cracked, crazy, ill-tempered, stuck-up, and stinking with affectation.'[3] In 1881, at the age of twenty-one, Ensor painted *La Rue de Flandre à Ostende*, of which the composition and palette are, of all his works, those which most closely remind us of certain French pictures. In 1886 he seems to have looked at Whistler before painting *Les Enfants à la Toilette* (Cat. no. 14).

The honeyed light which moulds the nude figures endows them with a poetry which has no equal until Bonnard. The rupture with realism was completely achieved. The lyricism of the north was triumphant. Just as Van Gogh sought to express his feelings by colour, Ensor sought to do the same by light, which he divided into *la gaie, la crue, la vive et rayonnante, la triste et brisée.*[4] The Impressionists were in his eyes no more than 'superficial daubers', while Neo-Impressionism was 'an art of cold calculation and narrow vision'. As the latter gained ground among *Les XX*, who came to accept it as the most modern language of art, Ensor's relations with his former friends deteriorated. Octave Maus tried to humour this *enfant terrible*, but without success. Touchy and arrogant at first, then maddened by worry, Ensor became almost servile (see letter of 1886 to O. Maus in the exhibition). Comforted and reassured, he was soon snarling again. It was his most inspired work that was the least understood. On the pretext that he had sent them in too late, his paintings were not hung in 1888, only his engravings being exhibited that year. It was then, tortured by doubt, that he began to turn his back on the real world. Masks and *chinoiseries*, formerly materials for still-life, were now animated and became at once heroes and puppets, while the skeleton became a reflection of himself (see letter of 1889 to O. Maus in the exhibition). He returned to canvases that had been laid by for years and worked on them again to introduce the incongruous, to make them provocative.[5] The shrewdest critics shied at them. 'Ensor,' wrote Verhaeren, 'sometimes seems to fumble blindly in the choice of his subjects.'[6] Those intellectuals who had been the first to defend Redon failed to perceive Ensor's relationship with Symbolism. They could not stomach his taste for almost trivial farce, his satirical buffoonery, for the equivalent of which we must turn to Alfred Jarry's *Ubu-Roi*, written in 1888 and produced by Lugné-Poe in 1896. Nor could they forgive him for being untranslatable into words and so ambiguous in his assaults – the sneering face behind the mask, but, in the last resort, at what?

Somewhat in Ensor's shadow, though the elder of the two, Guillaume Vogels, a late-comer to easel painting, was for long regarded as merely the most able representative of an Impressionism of the soil. That is to disregard some very Whistlerian nocturnes he did, and also to ignore the fact that Vogels, like any militant *vingtiste*, was thoroughly aware of the problems of the moment. A water-colourist of astonishing freedom, he expressed himself in oil with the same easy spontaneity. What were already being called *trouvailles du hazard* – that is to say the chance effects achieved by masses without outline or deliberate structure, the *taches*, the sweeps with the palette knife – all these he built up into a powerful pictorial orchestration, contrasting the solidity of matter with the subtlety of colouring. When he put aside the greys and browns that were so dear to him, he poured light and shade on to his canvas like a Fauve or a *tachiste*, as he is justly called, for it was for him that that term seems to have been invented. Thoroughly independent, he was one of the few *vingtistes* not to be carried away by that great event of artistic life in Brussels, the appearance of *Un Dimanche Après-midi à la Grande Jatte* in the *Salon des XX* in 1887. From that moment Finch, then Van de Velde, Van Rysselberghe, and Lemmen, paid homage to the powerful personality of Seurat. Despite the hostility of public opinion and the press, the Belgian school now became the bastion of Pointillism outside France.

In this activity, Finch was a torch-bearer rather

[3] Archives de l'Art contemporain en Belgique, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels (*Octave Maus Collection, gift of Albert Vander Linden*).

[4] *Les écrits de James Ensor*, Brussels, 1921, p. 23.

[5] M. de Maeyer, 'L'introduction du masque, du travesti et du squelette dans l'oeuvre de James Ensor', in *Bulletin des Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique*, 1963, pp. 69–88.

[6] E. Verhaeren, *La Jeune Belgique*, 1883–4, no. 3, p. 198.

than a disciple. 'I fear,' he wrote in January 1888, 'that inexpert eyes will not see the difference between us and our friends in Paris.'[7] Indeed that difference seems to have been noticed so little that Finch's works are now dispersed, and his name has no echo. It was he, however, always ready to drop what had been acquired for the sake of new discovery, who was one of the first to throw himself into decorative art, fully conscious of the human and social significance of what he was doing.

Van Rysselberghe, brilliant and malleable, warm in his friendships, was often at the elbow of Octave Maus, giving him advice. The portrait he did of the latter in 1885 (Cat. no. 64) shows the passing influence of Whistler. But with him Divisionism soon got the upper hand. In 1889 his pictures, which hung opposite Seurat's in the *Salon des XX*, earned the appreciation of the critics, who praised him almost to excess. Under the pointillist surface, his contemporaries perhaps detected the almost classical humanism of the portrait painter. Influenced by his time, Van Rysselberghe adapted his talent to the fashion of the day without changing the subtle character of his view of life, which is the real basis of his originality. He knew how to portray not only the bearing of the *fin-de-siècle* 'bourgeois élite' and its setting, with great economy of means, but also its physiognomy, touched by a melancholy comparable with that of the English aristocrats painted by Van Dyck.

The young Van de Velde came to *Les XX* like a moth to the candle. As a painter he had for long been groping. Manet then Van Gogh were his models, and finally Seurat. The humanist message of Van Gogh nagged at him until one day he succeeded in transposing it into a field which offered him unlimited scope. This he found in the decorative arts and architecture, which attracted him precisely because of their social implications, and appealed to his desire for action. He it was who later spoke of his 'complete nervous collapse' caused by the iron discipline of Pointillism.

In 1891 it was Georges Lemmen's turn to shake off the yoke. Illustrations, advertisements, and decorative work of various sorts enabled him to combine the teachings of Walter Crane, whom he made known in Belgium, with the arabesques of Art Nouveau and a somewhat literary Symbolism. For in Belgium Symbolism, which ran a parallel course to Impressionism before turning against it, found fertile ground. Having only just moved away from realism, Rops painted *La Mort au Bal*, a modern transposition, strongly spiced with Baudelairian pessimism, of the *danses macabres* of other days. As for his illustrations of the Symbolist poets, they followed the vagaries of an imagination that was liable to depart widely from the text, but his taste for virtuosity produced a profusion of accessories and ornaments which had the effect of softening the sharpness of his interpretation

The strangest figure of the *fin-de-siècle* 'malaise', which the Symbolists cultivated for the sake of the poetic inspiration it provided, was none other than Fernand Khnopff, one of the founders of *Les XX* and a great champion of the pre-Raphaelites, in whom he admired the combination of aesthetism and scrupulous accuracy in detail. His work too is a curious mixture of dreamy imagery and an almost fanatical verisimilitude; we know for instance that he worked from photographs, obliging his models to sit in the most impossible accoutrements and positions.[8] His work was often deliberately artificial and inaccessible, its meaning being generally hidden in a poem. English poetry, incidentally, was often his inspiration.

In 1889 *L'Art moderne* announced the advance of 'an art of thought'.[9] 'To express the invisible by the visible' was the watchword, taken from the theory of correspondence, and this aim is a continuous trend in Belgian painting. Mellery, votary of 'the soul of things', is, in this sense, the heir of the Primitives. Symbolism and intimism unite, here as formerly, in the humble guise of an everyday décor but one fraught with memories and forebodings. Degouve de Nuncques, even if his *Enfant au Hibou* (Cat. no. 7), a confrontation of two mysteries, was still set in the hieratism so dear to Khnopff, was soon to effect the liberation of these symbols from the ivory tower of literature. The air of aristocratic soulfulness reflected in his painting gave way to a sharply carved realism, creating new relationships between him and the spectator. Moreover, the development of Symbolism seems to have grown out of the mystery of Pointillism – that 'deliberate, slow art built up with calculation and reflection', given to analysis and concerned with things 'in virtue of their permanence rather than of their accidents', an art in which 'the deeper life, expressed by the spirit, increasingly affirms itself'.[10] This shrewd definition shows the bridge that unexpectedly connects Symbolism with the scientific theories of colour. Here we are at the threshold of linear Symbolism, one of the branches of Art Nouveau which is magnificently exemplified by Van de Velde's *Ornement de Fruits* (Cat. no. 80).

In 1893, a year after the formation of the Munich Secession, Octave Maus, with the support of his closest friends, dissolved *Les XX*, to replace it with another association, *La Libre Esthétique*, autocratic in structure and thus freed from the internal conflicts that arise when artists take part in the leadership. Down to 1914, Octave Maus was the only one to make the decisions and almost the only one to

[7] Archives de l'Art contemporain en Belgique, ibid.

[8] Ch. De Maeyer, 'Fernand Khnopff et ses modèles', in *Bulletin des Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique*, 1964, 1/2. (Special number devoted to the Archives de l'Art contemporain en Belgique.)

[9] *L'Art moderne*, 28 July 1889, p. 234.

[10] Ibid., 3 February 1889, p. 33.

employ his tireless energy to implement them. At his side there was only, and then only intermittently, Eugène Ysaye, the concert director, for, along with the plastic arts, music was taking a place of constantly growing importance. Concerts were given of new music, in which Debussy, Vincent d'Indy, Paul Dukas, Fauré, Chausson Duparc, Albeniz, Albert Roussel, Lekeu, Jongen, Chabrier, Albéric Magnard, Ravel, Florent Schmitt, and even Darius Milhaud, were played.

The choice of works exhibited was more eclectic and less extreme than had been that of *Les XX*. Though the *Libre Esthétique* was still situated at the cross-roads of all contemporary currents the influence of England had never been greater. In the year of the dissolution of *Les XX*, G. M. wrote: 'Of all the influences from abroad that we have felt during the last twenty-five years that of the English is the most palpable.'[11] In 1895 Watts and Holman Hunt each exhibited a portrait of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. The same year Olivier Georges Destrée published his notes on the pre-Raphaelites and English decorative art. He spoke of Walter Crane and William Morris.[12] For some time decorative work had become the spear-head of progress in art. Indeed, the novelty of the *Libre Esthétique* consisted largely in putting painting and sculpture on a footing of equality. The papers congratulated Maus for having brought off 'a master stroke, opening a new field of interest', merely by having exhibited furniture, rugs, screens, bookbinding, china, jewels, stained glass and upholsteries dispersed among the canvases.

Victor Horta was the first to unite into a decorative and architectural whole the various impulses which had led painting towards the idea of symbolic décor, with which he became identified. He gave to the curve – a curve which was already influencing poster art – an assured and provocative rhythm, that of Art Nouveau, which was soon to become an international language. Fascinated by the possibilities of glass and metal, Horta was led to a structural form which he elaborated completely afresh.

In a general way this urge to revitalise the style of daily life, and thus to transform that life itself, had been gradually emerging from various philosophic and social tendencies. The principal figures, from William Morris to Walter Crane, taking Gallé and Van de Velde on the way, were at the same time champions of social emancipation. The ivory tower was a thing of the past: the artist had now to fight to make aesthetics become democratic. The Liège painter, Serrurier-Bovy, considered his *Chambre d'Artisan*, exhibited in 1895, as a contribution to the study of the *Idée Artistique Nouvelle* which was to offer to the masses a complete artistic outlook without reference to the cultural conventions of the time. At the end of 1894 a society was formed with the object of introducing the arts to industry and thus bring them into current usage. The term *ouvrier de l'art*, applied by Lemmen to Walter Crane, tells the whole story.

The political mood of the day was not hostile to this development. In Belgium the struggle for universal suffrage had become acute in 1886, and remained so until its achievement in 1893. A growing ferment manifested itself in strikes. French anarchists taking refuge in Belgium brought their ideas with them. Signac's painting *Au temps de l'Harmonie, L'Age d'Or n'est pas dans le Passé il est dans l'Avenir*, exhibited at the *Libre Esthétique* in 1896, was part of this diffuse humanitarianism, and might be called its manifesto. As for Edmond Picard, he did not hesitate to brandish the banner of socialism in art when he said: 'When art has no social aim, it is a secondary matter, to be considered as no more than a somewhat contemptible bourgeois luxury.'[13] The very incarnation of these theories, Laermans, sent five works to the *Libre Esthétique* in 1895, one of which, *Un Soir de Grève* (Cat. no. 29), was widely commented on in the press. In his themes he is comparable to Constantin Meunier and Charles Degroux, but the epic tone of the one and the elegiac tone of the other puts them definitely in the other camp. If Laerman's subjects sometimes remind us of Ensor's *Pochards*, they nevertheless belong to a new human type. These are now not a group of individuals, but a class which is becoming conscious of its strength in the shoulder to shoulder fraternisation of a crowd in which each man is like his neighbour. In his style, in his synthesizing vision, his schematism and deliberate deformations, Laermans was following in the wake of Symbolism, though showing signs of what the Expressionists were later to do.

The same pioneer role was played by Jacob Smits. Living from 1889 near Mol, he became the painter of the flat bare land of the Campine, with its windmills, its cottages, and its deeply religious peasants in daily companionship with Christ and the Virgin. Here, too, the plastic language is stripped bare. There remains the line, tense with the force of its message; there remains the flood of light, the projection of the soul of a world imprisoned in eternity. Here we are at the very antipodes of the instantaneousness of Impressionism or of any search for modernity. Everything speaks of the quiet permanence of nature: everything speaks of the life eternal.

Are we not justified in emphasising, more than has been done hitherto, the parallelism between this mysticism, so imbued with rustic faith, and the aspirations of the first group to be formed at Laethem Saint Martin?

In 1899 Georges Minne, and the brothers Karel and Gustave Van de Woestyne, came to join Valerius

[11] *L'Emulation*, vol. XVIII, 1893, quoted by S. T. Madsen, *Sources of Art Nouveau*, New York, 1956.

[12] O. G. Destrée, *Les Préraphaélites, Notes sur l'Art decoratif et la Peinture en Angleterre*, Brussels, 1894.

[13] E. Picard, 'La socialisation de l'art'. Lecture given at *La Libre Esthétique*, Brussels, 1895. Excerpts published in *L'Art moderne*, 1895, pp. 98, 109, 116.

de Saedeleer at Laethem, a peaceful village on the banks of the Lys, where the last-named had recently installed himself. The poet Karel Van de Woestyne was very active in this little group, introducing a literary atmosphere open to northern influences. It was perhaps Georges Minne, however, the one-time member of *Les XX*, who was the most alive to modern tendencies. His work combined the two most powerful springs of Symbolism: a search for the infinite, devoid of any particular aesthetic principles, which extends from Burne-Jones through Khnopff to Redon, and the expressive stylisation developed by the decorative artists. This style oscillated between two tendencies: sometimes it gave itself to intertwined arabesques turned in upon themselves as though suffering from a feeling of claustrophobia, sometimes it turned towards a strict and pure economy of form, discovering simultaneously with Horta the regenerating stimulus of the vertical. Gustave Van de Woestyne was soon won over by the mysticism of his friend, Minne. Taking his own themes from peasant life, he adds a seraphic softness derived from the pre-Raphaelites. In 1902 at an exhibition in Bruges he discovered the Flemish primitives, and, from then on, his work plunged into a still more deliberate archaism. De Saedeleer, the first votary of the Flemish soil, also infused into his landscapes a feeling of great tenderness. All three 'were as a matter of fact in the same position as Puvis de Chavannes or Ferdinand Hodler, that is to say using at the same time Symbolism of subject matter and Symbolism of colour and form'.[14] Thus it is that a group of artists often regarded as regionalists before all else, isolated in rural peace, have in reality an appreciable position in the artistic consciousness of Europe. Their work took up and transformed that melancholy echo which was heard everywhere at the dawn of the twentieth century.

The *Libre Esthétique* did not really do justice to the importance of this colony of artists in the development of Belgian art. It sought for a new lease of life in welcoming to its salon the circle *Vie et Lumière*, a group of painters who had remained faithful to Impressionism, in particular Claus and Heymans – though it must be added that the latter extended his experiments in luminous vibrations towards a highly personal Pointillism, putting short, thick brush strokes on his canvas to produce the shot effects of a peacock tail. It sought also a closer contact with the Munich and Vienna Secessions; it multiplied its invitations to Germans, Russians and Italians. We see Emil Nolde among them just before the formation of the German Expressionist group *Die Brücke*; we see the Nabis, then the Fauves. Nevertheless the day had passed when every year at the *Libre Esthétique* a picture was shown 'in front of which people came to blows', to use the description of Eugéne Demolder. Octave Maus looked back retrospectively:

[14] P. Haesaerts, *Laethem-Saint-Martin, Le village élu de l'art flamand*, Brussels, 1965, p. 85.

memorial exhibitions of those who had gone were now the chief events of interest. In 1900 the public of Brussels were shown the brilliant star of Evenepoel a few months after his premature death, leaving a name that Octave Maus associated with that of the composer Guillaume Lekeu, another precocious genius who left his work uncompleted. A painter of modern life, Evenepoel was alive to the preoccupations of decorative art, which he reconciled with an intimism charged with melancholic tenderness. By virtue of his style, and his complete independence of any movement, he was the only Nabi of Belgian painting.

Probably under the influence of Van Rysselberghe, Maus, in 1903, turned away from the young Picasso. When, in 1911, the first Cubist exhibition abroad was held in Brussels, in the Musée d'Art Moderne, it was organised by a somewhat obscure circle, the *Indépendants*, and the review *L'Art moderne* had nothing but contempt for it.

The wish to consolidate the victories of the past entails the risk of crystallisation. The mainspring of art, that principle of evolution that Gustave Maus and *Les XX* had been the first to applaud, was now to go forward unaided by what was left of that movement.

Already the incoming tide was bringing new names to the forefront of Belgian art. Spilliaert carried on the tradition of Symbolism in his nocturnes full of mystery, and made use of Art Nouveau arabesques to border the waves breaking on the sea shore. But the static and monumental figures, small though they may be, of the wives of fishermen facing out to sea, show a forceful schematism to which Constant Permeke was later to give an epic accent. This solitary figure from Ostend played an important part in the gestation of Flemish Expressionism. Moreover his taste for the bizarre, his anxiety, oddly tinged with irony, took him to the forefront of Surrealism. A strange precursor, he took little account of his discoveries, refusing to go to the end of the road his wanderings had opened up to him.

At about the same period another of the Laethem group, Servaes, searching in rustic subjects for mystical themes, discovered the method of reduction to essentials and of expressive deformation which was to be the key of Flemish Expressionism.

From 1904 to 1909 a second colony of artists was working at the chosen village of Laethem. This included Fritz Van den Berghe, Gustave de Smet, and Permeke. In the end they were to take Flemish painting to one of its highest points of originality and power, but, in the first years of their rural retreat, they were under the influence of Claus, who lived nearby at Astene, another village on the Lys. However, their sunny reveries were already faintly coloured by that tone of subjective Symbolism which really belongs to them. It needed the shock of war, in which incidentally the group was scattered, for them to find their true language.

Many artists sought refuge abroad, some in Holland, others in England. Claus came to London. Like Monet, like Derain, 'that firebrand of colour', he painted the bridges of the Thames. His finest pictures were inspired by grey and pink sunsets, peopled by shadows. Valerius de Saedeleer, Georges Minne and Gustave Van de Woestyne were in Wales; Hippolyte Daeye, a native of Ghent, and a friend of Van de Woestyne and Tytgat, had his studio in Chelsea. Edgard Tytgat was in London too. Caught up by the revival of craftsmanship, which touched a sensitive chord in him, he made toys which were exhibited in the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1916. Acquiring a hand-press he printed woodcuts, reinventing subjects of Flemish folklore, for which he had tender nostalgic feelings.

Half-way through the war, in 1916, a career full of promise was brought to a sudden end by the death of Rik Wouters in Amsterdam. All that was left of his regiment, after the *débâcle* at Antwerp, were interned in Holland, where illness soon sapped his vitality. To appreciate the Dionysaic intoxication he introduced into Flemish art, one must compare his *Folle Danseuse* with the statuettes of Degas. With the latter everything is calculated, the secret laws of equilibrium have been observed, while with the former all is violence and daring. The élan of this admirable work is not so apparent in his painting. Here there is a duel between the affirmation of solid form, the search for a structure reaching into the depths of space, on the one hand, and the splashes of colour that flicker on the surface. The message of Rik Wouters, the painter, resides in this difficult division between the resplendence of light and a sensuous feeling for mass, which resists that light. From this opposition we are made conscious of a multiple life whose inner conflicts are its vitality. The intimism of an Evenepoel, if its vibrations may be felt again in Rik Wouters, is sustained by a deeper feeling belonging to a broader world.

In 1916, when one door was closing, another was thrown wide open. Permeke, evacuated to England on being wounded at the front, found his true self in his solitude, as his strength gradually returned to him. It was at Chardstock, in Devonshire, that he finished his first masterpieces. His paintings sounded the return to the rhythm of the cosmos, putting man back once more in the midst of the elements, with the winds, the seasons, and the mysteries of the sky. Before long, the human being was to become that sturdy proud barrier which nature opposes to the tides.

Translated by Geoffrey Sainsbury

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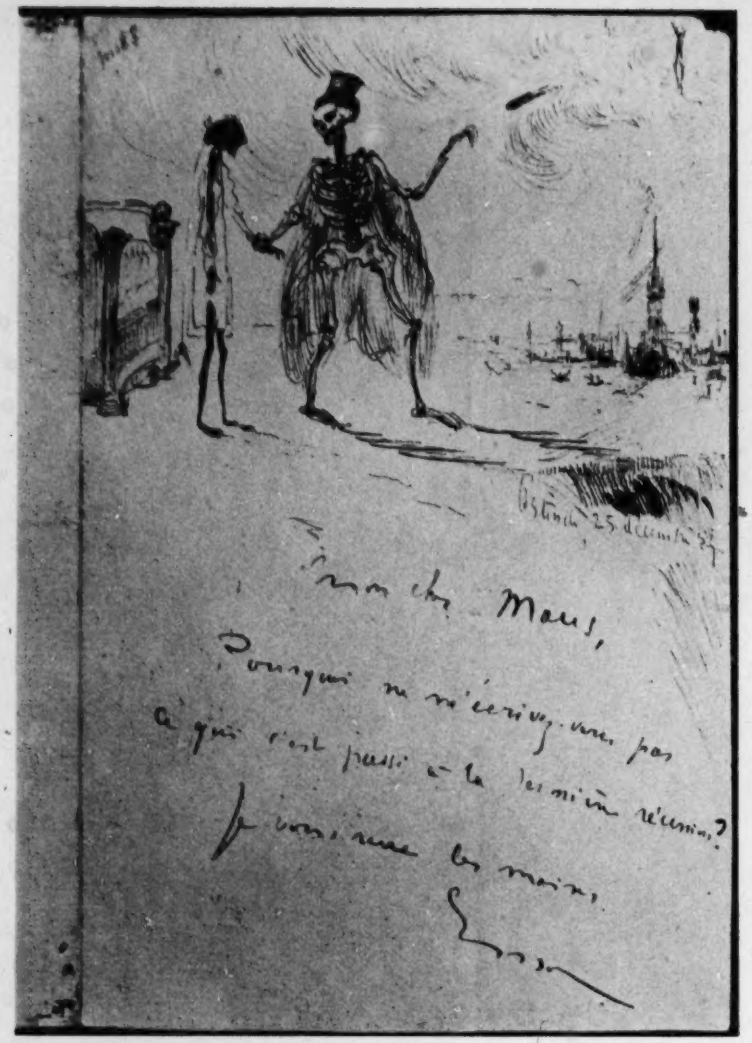

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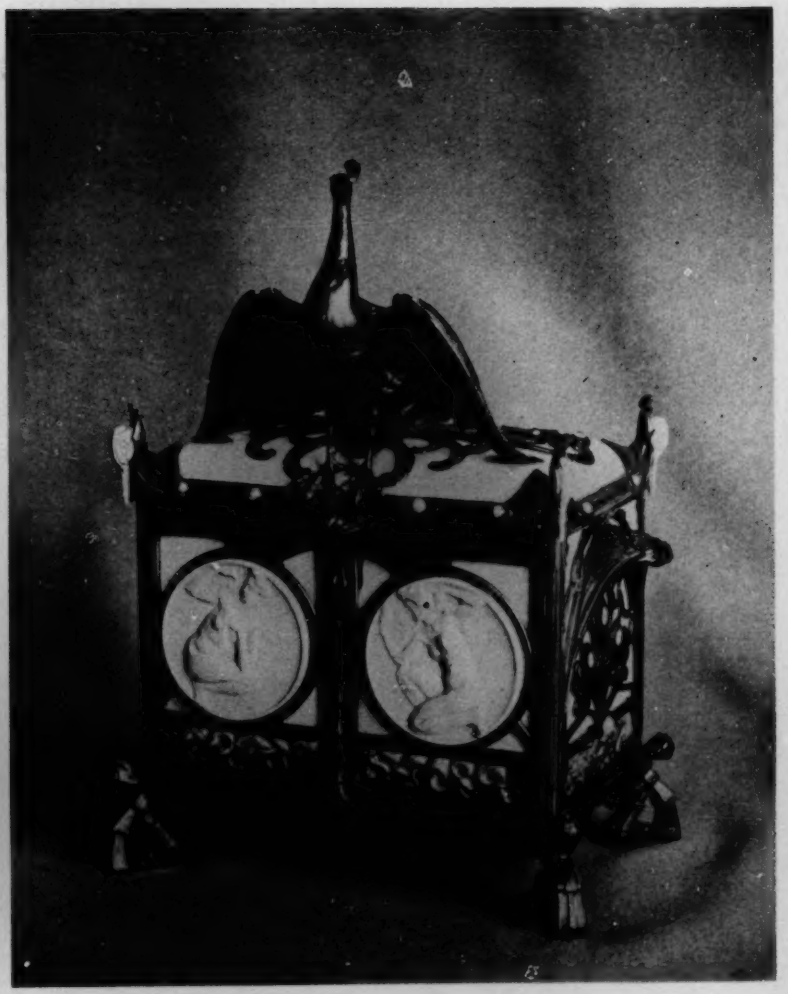

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Paintings, drawings, sculpture and graphic works

The paintings are in oil, unless otherwise stated. The measurements are in inches, followed by centimetres, height first.

Jean BRUSSELMANS Brussels 1884 – Dilbeek 1953

Engraver-lithographer from the age of fifteen. Student at the academy in Brussels from 1904 to 1907 and then devoted himself to painting. With Rik Wouters was a member of group known as the 'Brabançon Fauves'. Settled in 1924 at Dilbeek where he lived a solitary life devoting all his time to painting. In 1936 designed décor and costumes for Schönberg's monodrama *Erwartung*, and in 1937 for Vondel's *Lucifer*.

Brusselmans developed his own artistic personality when he settled at Dilbeek in 1924. In his landscapes, interiors and still-lifes he is concerned with expressive essentials but he is an Expressionist who organised his compositions very strictly.

1 Self-portrait 1915
Canvas, 26⅜ x 32¼ / 67 x 83
Lent by Paul Haesaerts, Brussels

Emile CLAUS Vyve-Saint-Eloi 1849 – Astene, East Flanders 1924

Student at the academy of Antwerp. Painter of landscapes and genre scenes. Settled at Deurle, near Ghent, in 1888 and in the same year took a studio in Paris where he became friends with Le Sidaner and came strongly under the influence of Monet. His impressionist style dates from this period. Although this contained certain personal qualities of composition it borrows from the French Impressionists their juxtaposition of complementary colours on the canvas, their short brush-strokes and clear light palette. Encouraged by his friend, Camille Lemonnier, he had thenceforward one principal aim: to represent on his canvas the effects of the sun's rays. He had a very successful career and a considerable number of Belgian, and even foreign, painters were influenced by him. But his manner rapidly became pontifical. By the time of the 1914–18 war (which he spent in London) a decline had set in. When he returned from London, where he observed and painted the Thames at different times of day and night, his prestige in Belgium had crumbled and a quite different spirit was about in Brussels. His home, 'Zonneschyn', at Astene, has been made into a Claus museum.

2 Sunset on the Thames 1916
Canvas, 28 x 36¼ / 71 x 92
Lent by the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels

Hippolyte DAEYE Ghent 1873 – Antwerp 1952

Belonging to a well-to-do middle-class family, Daeye was able to devote himself entirely to painting. A student at the academy of Ghent in 1896, of the Institut Supérieur des Beaux-Arts of Antwerp in 1899, he already had his own studio in 1890. He discovered Velasquez on a visit to Spain in 1904 and his influence remained paramount, with that of Turner, Whistler and Modigliani whose work he saw in London during a stay there from 1914–20. Before his period in England he was an Impressionist landscape painter working with a somewhat sombre palette. On his return to Antwerp, where he remained until his death, he turned entirely to the painting of children and young girls with extreme delicacy of touch and colour. He led a solitary life, refusing commissions and pupils and developing an art of great sensitivity and dreamy introspection.

3 Sunrise on the Thames 1916
Canvas, 23⅝ x 19¾ / 60 x 50
Lent by Maurice Daeye, Anvers

4 Portrait of my son when ill 1918
Canvas, 42½ x 33⅛ / 107 x 84
Lent by Suzanne Daeye, Brussels

Henri de BRAEKELEER Antwerp 1840 – Antwerp 1888

Came from an artistic background and received his first lessons from his father and from his uncle, Henri Leys, one of the best Belgian nineteenth-century painters. At fourteen he already attended the academy of Antwerp and at eighteen he exhibited at the Antwerp salon. Visited Germany and Holland where he discovered the Dutch so-called little masters, and Vermeer of Delft made a strong impression on him. Painter of bourgeois interiors, his technique was at first very precise. Nervous troubles caused an interruption in his work between 1880 and 1884. When he started to paint again his handling was broader and freer. Always delicate in health, he died at the age of forty-eight. Little-known during his life he is today considered the most important Belgian nineteenth-century painter, after Ensor.

5 Picture gallery at the Terninck Institute 1884
Canvas, 25¼ x 27⅛ / 64 x 69
Lent by the Musée Royal des Beaux-Arts, Antwerp

Plate 7
6 The meal 1885 NOT EXHIBITED
Panel, 17¾ x 31½ / 45 x 79
Lent by the Musée Royal des Beaux-Arts, Antwerp

William DEGOUVE DE NUNCQUES
Montherme, French Ardennes 1867 – Stavelot, Liège 1935

After 1870 his parents, who were French, settled in Belgium. Following a brief period of study at the academy of Ixelles he worked on his own under the guidance of Jan Toorop. He was drawn into the literary circle of the *Jeune Belgique* which orientated him towards Symbolism. In 1894 he became the brother-in-law of Verhaeren. He was able, owing to his private means, to travel widely in Europe. He spent the 1914–18 war in Holland where he achieved great success (many of his pictures are in the Kröller Müller Museum at Otterlo). After the war he settled at Stavelot. From 1928 onwards a paralysis increasingly curtailed his activity. He was a member of the *Groupe des XX* of the *Libre Esthétique* and of *Vie et Lumière*. He was an artist of intelligence and sensitivity who took his subjects from nature and filled them with a magic quality.

7 Child with owl 1892
Canvas, 17 x 14¾ / 43 x 37
Lent by A. De Glas, Mortsel/Antwerp

Plate 3
8 Nocturne in the Parc Royal, Brussels 1897
Pastel, 25½ x 19¾ / 65 x 50
Lent by Madame Claudine Verhas, Brussels

9 Peacocks 1898
Pastel, 35 x 50 / 89 x 127
Lent by Madame A. Fromental, Brussels

Valerius DE SAEDELEER Alost, East Flanders 1867 – Leupegem, East Flanders 1941

The son of a manufacturer who sent him to work in a textile firm which he soon left to study at the Ghent academy. He then became a pupil of the landscape painter Frans Courtens with whom he went to Holland. From 1904 to 1908 he lived at Laethem-St Martin and there found his true path, under the influence of Georges Minne and Gustave van de Woestijne, the principal figures of the first Laethem group. He also became interested in Symbolist ideas and the Flemish Primitives and threw off the influence of Courtens. He was inspired by Brueghel in his painting of the Flemish countryside. De Saedeleer's best work dates from the years 1908 to 1914. On his return from England, where he took refuge from 1914 to 1920, he settled at Etikhove, near Oudenaarde, and then at Peupegem, where he died. Apart from a portrait of a sower, painted in 1904, de Saedeleer was exclusively a landscape painter.

10 The river; end of a beautiful day 1905
Canvas, 25⅝ x 29½ / 65 x 75
Lent by F. De Blieck, Brussels

11 Landscape after the storm 1907
Canvas, 33½ x 37⅜ / 84 x 95
Lent by the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels

Gustave DE SMET Ghent 1877 – Deurle, East Flanders 1943

Son of a decorative painter and brother of the painter Léon De Smet. Studied at Ghent academy from 1888 to 1895 and settled at Laethem in 1901 where he lived among the artists of the first and second Laethem groups. At the outset a post-Impressionist, like his friends, it was not until the years of the first world war, when he was in Holland, that he developed his own style, in contact with Jan Sluyters, de Campendonck and Le Fauconnier. He is one of the most important painters of Flemish Expressionism. Between 1926 and 1928 he was captivated by Cubism. In his last years his drawing becomes more supple and his colour richer and warmer. Besides landscapes and scenes of village life he painted some very fine portraits of women. He died at Deurle, where he had lived since 1927.

12 Woman of Spakenburg 1917
Canvas, 59 x 39⅜ / 150 x 100
Lent by the Musée Royal des Beaux-Arts, Antwerp

Léon DE SMET born Ghent 1881

Painter of portraits, interiors and still-lifes. Studied at the Ghent academy. Joined his brother, Gustave, at Laethem-St Martin in 1906. His work owes more to Claus than to the other painters at Laethem. In London from 1914 until 1926, where he had considerable success as a portrait painter; his sitters included Galsworthy, Bernard Shaw and Conrad. On his return to Belgium he settled at Deurle and for a brief period adopted an Expressionist manner before returning to his earlier impressionist technique.

13 View of London from the roof of Whitehall Palace with old Waterloo Bridge 1915
Canvas, 29½ x 39½ / 76 x 101
Lent by François Thoen, Brussels
Formerly in the collection of Bernard Shaw

James ENSOR Ostend 1860 – Ostend 1949

His father was English and his mother Flemish. He spent much of his childhood in the souvenir shop kept by his grandmother. Studied at the academy in Brussels and then returned to Ostend where he remained for the whole of his long life. At the start of his career he painted bourgeois interiors in an impressionist style but with a sober palette. The singular and personal art which he developed places him at the source of several currents of modern art:

Fauvism, Expressionism and even Surrealism, although he never formed any school. From 1883 his palette lightened. Beside the still-lifes and landscapes new themes began to appear; masks, skeletons and biblical subjects seen by a fractious spirit. Underrated by serious critics at first, he achieved great success after 1900 and was created a baron in 1929. He produced his finest work between 1879 and 1898, thereafter tending to repeat himself with less original inspiration. For this reason, although Ensor lived so long into the twentieth century, he is considered a nineteenth-century artist. He is also very well known for his drawings and graphic work.

The house where he lived in Ostend was made into a museum after his death.

14 Children at their toilette 1886
Canvas, 53⅛ x 43¼ / 135 x 110
Lent by C. Jussiant, Antwerp

15 The curly cabbage 1893
Canvas, 28¾ x 34¼ / 73 x 87
Lent by Mme Jean Krebs, Brussels

16 Music in the rue de Flandre 1891
Panel, 9½ x 7½ / 24 x 19
Lent by the Musée Royal des Beaux-Arts, Antwerp

Plate 2
17 Vive et rayonnante entrée du Christ à Jérusalem 1885
Charcoal, 80⅝ x 60 / 205 x 152
Lent by the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Ghent
This is one of a series of six large drawings, done in 1885 and 1886, which Ensor titled *Les Auréoles du Christ ou les sensibilités de la lumière*. It was from this drawing, the third *auréole, la vive et Rayonnante*, that Ensor subsequently developed the composition of *Christ's entry into Brussels, on mardi-gras*, 1888.

18 Boats on the beach 1888
Etching, 7 x 10⅛ / 17·8 x 25·7
Lent by A. Taevernier, Ghent

19 The good judges 1894
Etching, 7 1/16 x 9⅜ / 17·9 x 23·9
Lent by A. Taevernier, Ghent

20 The vengeance of 'Hop-Frog' 1898
Etching, 14⅛ x 9⅞ / 35·9 x 25·1
Lent by A. Taevernier, Ghent
During this year Ensor engraved forty-four plates, a third of his total graphic production. The subject is taken from Hans Andersen.

21 Christ's entry into Brussels 1898
Etching, 9⅞ x 14 3/16 / 25 x 36·1
Lent by A. Taevernier, Ghent
This etching is a free transposition, in reverse, of the great painting of the same title of 1888.

Henri EVENEPOEL Nice 1872 – Paris 1899

Born in Nice of Belgian parents, his mother died when he was young and he was brought up by his grandparents near Brussels. At an early age he attended drawing classes at the school of Saint-Josse-ten-Noode and showed real talent. In 1892 he studied with Gustave Moreau in Paris where Matisse and Rouault were among his fellow students. Like them he preferred to paint from nature rather than accept the teaching of his master. The discovery of Manet was a revelation to him. The popular quarters and landscapes of Paris were his favourite subjects. He made a journey in North Africa in 1897 and died of typhoid in Paris after his return. In the six years of his artistic activity Evenepoel painted about 250 pictures amongst which are some outstanding portraits as well as scenes of Parisian and North African life.

22 Sunday in the Bois de Boulogne 1889
Canvas, 31½ x 23⅝ / 80 x 60
Lent by Gilbert Périer, Brussels

23 Woman with a white hat 1897
Canvas, 23½ x 19½ / 59·5 x 49·5
Lent by Louis Franck, London

Plate 9
24 Sunday promenade at St Cloud 1899
Canvas, 74⅞ x 118 / 190 x 300
Lent by the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Liège

Alfred William FINCH Brussels 1854 – Helsinki 1930

Of half-English descent. Painter, engraver and potter. One of the founders of *Les XX* in 1884. In London in 1886 he met Whistler, whom he admired. First saw the work of Seurat in 1887 and in the following years painted a number of good pointillist pictures. He was always interested in new ideas and introduced neo-Impressionism to Belgium. He also appears to be the first of the Belgian artists to discover the English craft revival. Became interested in ceramics in his later years.

25 Haystacks 1889
Canvas, 12⅝ x 19¾ / 32 x 50
Lent by the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Ixelles

See also Decorative art section, Cat. nos. 78, 79

Adrien-Joseph HEYMANS Antwerp 1839 – Schaerbeek, Brussels 1921

Studied at the academy in Antwerp and spent the years between 1855 and 1858 in Paris where he knew Rousseau, Corot, Millet and Daubigny. His early work already anticipates Impressionism in his treatment of light. He did not adopt the techniques of French Impressionism, but developed a free and direct handling while respecting a traditional treatment of form. His landscapes and seascapes show a sensitive response to nature under different conditions of light. Painted the Campine and founded, with Meyers and Rosseels, the Termonde school. Settled in Brussels in 1869 and joined the *Societé*

Libre des Beaux-Arts and then the *Groupe des XX*. He was one of the founders of the group *Vie et Lumière*.

26 Spring 1900
Canvas, 62¼ x 99¼ / 158 x 252
Lent by the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels

Fernand KHNOPFF Château de Grembergen-lez-Termonde, East Flanders 1858 – Brussels 1921

Son of a magistrate, he began law studies at Brussels University but abandoned them to attend the academy where he studied under Mellery. Stayed in Paris in 1879 where he studied with Gustave Moreau. A successful and fashionable painter, he exhibited regularly with the *Groupe des XX*. He was influenced by the pre-Raphaelites, especially Burne-Jones and Rossetti. Preferred working in watercolour, pastel and in graphic techniques. Made a number of polychromed sculptures and decorative panels, designed posters and costumes and décor for the theatre, notably for *Le roi Arthur* by Chausson. He had a British wife and spent several years in England.

Plate 8
27 Art 1896
Canvas, 19¾ x 59 / 50·5 x 150
Lent by the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels

28 The abandoned town *c.* 1893
Pastel, 30 x 27¼ / 76 x 69
Lent by the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels

Eugène LAERMANS Brussels 1864 – Brussels 1940

Studied at the school of drawing at Molenbeek in Brabant, and then with Constant Montald at the academy in Brussels. His deafness, the result of meningitis contracted when he was eleven, had a profound influence on his work, which has a somewhat pessimistic character. He painted scenes of peasant life and industrial workers in a style distinguished by angular drawing and cold unified tones. Aimed increasingly at a monumental and decorative style which avoided anecdote. To heighten dramatic effect he distorted some of his figures in a manner which foreshadows Expressionism. Became blind in 1924. Was created a baron in 1927.

Plate 5
29 The strike, evening 1893
Canvas, 41⅜ x 45¼ / 105 x 115
Lent by the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels

30 The funeral 1903
Canvas, 23⅝ x 31½ / 60 x 80
Lent by the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Ixelles

Georges LEMMEN Schaerbeek, Brussels 1865 – Uccle 1916

Painter of portraits, figure compositions, still-lifes and landscapes in the style of French Impressionism. Also made etchings and lithographs. Pupil of Hendricks and Amedée Bourson at the drawing school of Saint-Josse-ten-Noode. Was influenced by Van Rysselberghe.

31 The visitor 1889
Canvas, 26¾ x 20⅞ / 68 x 53
Lent by M. Nyns, Brussels

32 The siesta
Canvas, 22⅞ x 28⅜ / 58 x 72
Lent by M. Nyns, Brussels

Xavier MELLERY Brussels 1845 – Brussels 1921

Painter of figures, portraits, landscapes and interiors, genre pictures and decorative compositions. Student at the Brussels academy (1860–67), his early pictures stem from the work of Leys and Charles De Groux. His personal style first developed as a result of a journey to the island of Marken, made with the purpose of illustrating a story by Charles M. Coster, which he described as an attempt to express 'silence' and the 'soul of things'. An important factor in this attempt lies in interpretations of nocturnal effects and the rendering of evening light. Two distinct types of painting are found in Mellery's work: his pictures of interiors and figures, and his decorative painting with its symbolical, allegorical and literary characteristics. The latter, generally conceived in terms of vast mural compositions, nevertheless contain some smaller works which are amongst his most important (ideas and sketches for medallions, diplomas, posters, etc.). Their technique is basically similar: sepia on gold ground. A typical example of this style is the composition entitled *Delicacy is the daughter of strength* (Cat. no. 34). His technique is assured and skilful – his colours are muted, dominated by greys and blacks. As a draughtsman he illustrated – together with C. Meunier – *La Belgique* by Lemonnier. His official commissions include the designs for the statues which adorn the Petit Sablon Square in Brussels. He occasionally signs his work with his initials XM interlaced.

Plate 4
33 Autumn 1890
Pencil, chalk and watercolour, 35⅜ x 22½ / 90·5 x 57
Lent by the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels

34 Delicacy is the daughter of strength 1900
Papier collé, 31⅛ x 22½ / 79 x 57
Lent by the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels

35 Kitchen interior
Black chalk, 22⅛ x 30¾ / 56 x 78
Lent by the Musée Royal des Beaux-Arts, Antwerp

Georges MINNE Ghent 1866 – Laethem-St Martin 1941

Studied successively at the academies in Ghent (1882–84) and Brussels (1895–99). His meeting with Maurice Maeterlinck was crucial in the development

of his artistic career. He illustrated for him *Les Serres chaudes* and other Symbolist works. His first sculptures still show the influence of Rodin. In 1898 he settled at Laethem-St Martin and became the moving spirit of the first Laethem school. An exhibition of Flemish Primitives at Bruges in 1902 increased his inclination to seek inspiration in medieval art. He sculpted tense and mystical figures of thin adolescents. Towards 1908 he went through a more naturalistic period modelling himself on the style of Constantin Meunier. From 1912 to 1914 he taught at the academy in Ghent. He spent the war years in England where he devoted himself exclusively to drawing, principally in charcoal. When he again took up sculpture, among his favourite subjects were maternities in which the figures are scarcely detatched from the marble block. He exercised a considerable influence on a number of German sculptors, notably Lehmbrück. At one time a member of the *Groupe des XX*.

Plate 12
36 Mother weeping for her child 1886
Bronze, 18 x 5⅞ x 9⅞ / 45·5 x 15 x 25
Lent by the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels

37 Little kneeling figure 1896
Marble, h. 18½ / 47
Lent by the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Ghent

38 Man with goatskin bottle 1897
Bronze, 25 x 18¾ x 11 / 63·5 x 47·5 x 28
Lent by the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Ghent

39 Boy bearing a reliquary 1897
Bronze, h. 37⅞ / 96
Lent by the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Ghent

40 Frontispiece for *Les Serres chaudes* by Maurice Maeterlinck 1889
Pen and ink and watercolour 13¾ x 9⅞ / 35 x 25
Lent by Paul van der Perre, Brussels

41 Mother weeping 1890
Pencil, 15¾ x 11½ / 39 x 29
Lent by Mme Robert Lecerff, Brussels

42 Pietà
Charcoal on canvas, 17¾ x 25⅝ / 45 x 65
Lent by the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels

43 Christ with the chalice 1916–18
Charcoal, 18½ x 11¾ / 47 x 30
Lent by the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Ghent

44 Mother and child 1918
Pencil, 14⅛ x 10 / 36 x 25·5
Lent by the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Ghent

Constant PERMEKE Antwerp 1886 – Jabbeke, West Flanders 1952

Son of the painter of marine subjects, H. Permeke. Student at the Bruges and Antwerp academies. From 1909 was a member of the second Laethem group, characterised more by its anti-academic attitude than by any established programme of its own. Mobilised in the war, Permeke was badly wounded and evacuated to England. Returning to Belgium in 1918 he settled at Jabbeke in 1925 and died there in 1952. The Permeke Museum was set up at Jabbeke after his death.

Permeke began painting as a post-Impressionist but emancipated himself from this movement before 1914. In 1916, isolated in Devonshire and not having worked for two years, his style crystallised in a number of great landscapes and the mysterious figure composition, *The Stranger*. His first expressionist pictures date from shortly afterwards. He is the painter of Flanders and its inhabitants, an artist of great power and forcefulness, the dominant figure of Belgian Expressionism, and one of the most important artists of the whole Expressionist movement.

Apart from his paintings his work includes magnificent drawings and from 1936 onwards he carried out a number of sculptures.

45 Landscape in Great Britain 1914–18
Canvas, 24⅝ x 29⅛ / 62 x 74
Lent by J. Janssen, Lierre

46 The butcher 1916
Canvas, 59 x 47¼ / 150 x 120
Lent by Max Janlet, Brussels

Félicien ROPS Namur 1833 – Essonnes, Seine-et-Oise 1898

Painter of genre subjects, figures and landscapes. Engraver and lithographer. Studied at the academy at Namur and enrolled at Brussels University to study law and also worked at the academy Saint-Luc where Louis Dubois, De Groux and Constantin Meunier were working. In 1856 founded the magazine *Uylenspiegel* and revealed a talent for political and satirical drawing. In 1857 he married and lived in Namur. He continued to paint in Brussels with Artan and Dubois with whom he founded the *Société Libre des Beaux-Arts*, of which he became vice-president in 1868. On his return to Belgium after a short period in Paris he tried in vain to revive the art of etching and establish an official engraving studio. In 1874 he settled finally in Paris where he became well-known for his illustrations. Continued to paint and made painting expeditions with Artan all along the Belgian coast. His seascapes, generally small, are vivid impressions painted with a light touch in clear, bright colour. He exhibited an important series of landscapes in 1880 at the *Cercle des Arts*, rue Vivienne. But his major activity was in the fields of illustration, engraving and lithography. As an illustrator special mention should be made of his series for *Les Diaboliques* by Barbey Aurevilly.

47 Landscape in Norway, *c.*1867
Canvas, 14½ x 25½ / 36 x 64
Lent by the Musée Félicien Rops, Namur

48 Frontispiece for *Les Epaves* by Baudelaire 1868
Etching on Japanese paper, 19¾ x 15¾ / 50 x 39
Lent by the Musée Félicien Rops, Namur

49 The vine leaf 1895
Pencil, with coloured chalk, 19¾ x 15¾ / 50 x 40
Lent by the Musée Félicien Rops, Namur

50 The death penalty
Black chalk, 26 x 20½ / 66 x 52
Lent by the Musée Félicien Rops, Namur

Ferdinand SCHIRREN Antwerp 1872 – Brussels 1944

Painter of figures, landscapes and still-lifes. Studied with the sculptor J.-B. de Keyser and de Stallaert at the Brussels academy and then with Jef Lambeaux. First exhibited sculpture where the treatment of form suggests Cubism. In his painting, too, the approach and technique anticipates Fauvism and Constructivism. His pictures from 1908 onwards show great freedom in handling. After the 1914–18 war, which he spent in Brussels, he largely gave up sculpture and concentrated on painting in gouache and watercolour. To the end of his life he worked in the chromatic style of juxtaposed pure colours by which he is known and which he developed with Rik Wouters and the group of Belgian painters who are known as the 'Brabançon Fauves'. He was one of the founders of the group *Labeur* (1898).

51 The edge of the wood 1912
Canvas, 21¾ x 18½ / 55 x 46
Lent by G. Berthe, Brussels

Willy SCHLOBACH Brussels 1864 – Monnenhorn, Bavaria 1951

Studied at the academy in Brussels. Painter of landscapes and still-lifes. One of the group of Belgian painters who adopted neo-Impressionism. Founder-member of the *Groupe des XX*.

52 Wheat-sheaves 1892
Panel, 11¼ x 16½ / 29·5 x 42
Lent by Jean Willems, Brussels

Albert SERVAES born Ghent 1883

Painter of religious subjects, rural scenes and landscapes. One of the members of the first Laethem group. Worked as a travelling salesman for groceries and attended evening classes at the Ghent academy where Frits Van den Berghe and Gustave Van de Woestyne were fellow-students. With them rented a house at Laethem where they met to paint after work. Entirely without means, and in order to devote himself to painting, Servaes moved into the house of a poor peasant of the Laethem region and lived there for nine years. From 1905, when his friends Gustave De Smet and Constant Permeke were still painting in an Impressionist style, Servaes, under the influence of Georges Minne, was already moving towards a sombre and tragic manner which marks the beginning of Belgian Expressionism. Through the influence of Father Jérôme his art became imbued with a religious spirit which intensified after the 1914–18 war, which he spent at Laethem. His style became harsh and uncompromising and a charcoal drawing of the stations of the cross roused passionate controversy in Roman Catholic circles. The church forbade the exhibition of Servaes' works in places of public devotion (this interdiction was lifted in 1937). Nevertheless, Servaes produced other religious cycles as well as large decorative panels, designs for stained glass and drawings for the Abbey of Orval. In his later work he sought to modify Expressionist distortions and to render nature more objectively. Illustrator and lithographer, he illustrated a translation of the *Récit de la Passion* by Cyriel Vershaeve (1918).

53 Poor man's burial 1907
Canvas, 35½ x 39¾ / 90 x 100
Lent by Albert Bouckaert, Kruishoutem

54 Round the grave 1908
Canvas, 26¾ x 22 / 68 x 56
Lent by G. Crombé, Ghent

Jacob SMITS Rotterdam 1856 – Mol, Campine 1928

Painter of interiors, landscapes and portraits. His father was a decorative painter. At the age of seventeen he studied at the academy in Brussels and then in Munich, Vienna and Rome. For a short time after his return to Holland he ran the school of decorative arts at Haarlem. In 1889 he settled at Mol in the Campine. His early works are painted with a low-toned palette which became lighter towards 1890 when he developed his own very personal style. The expressiveness of his handling of light reached its height in the pictures of his last period between 1918 and 1928.

55 Mill in the Campine
Canvas, 39¾ x 42½ / 101 x 108
Lent by the Musée Royal des Beaux-Arts, Antwerp

56 The disciples at Emmaus 1905
Canvas, 19 x 22⅞ / 48 x 58
Private collection

Léon SPILLIAERT Ostend 1881 – Ostend 1946

Son of an Ostend school-teacher, he was self-taught as an artist. In 1908 he met Verhaeren with whom

he became friends. Worked by preference in gouache watercolour and pastel. Developed a personal style which sets him apart from all well-defined artistic groups. He was touched by Symbolism and some of his work comes near to the Nabis. Expressionist and Surrealist elements enter in his paintings of which Ostend itself was the real inspiration. Spilliaert illustrated books by Maeterlinck and Hellens.

57 Woman with a veil 1903
Wash, 14⅛ x 8⅝ / 37 x 22
Lent by the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Ostend

58 The magic staircase 1907
Ink, watercolour and chalk, 17 x 29½ / 43 x 75
Lent by A. De Glas, Antwerp

Reproduced on the cover
59 Pietà 1910
Coloured chalk, 21⅝ x 28¾ / 55 x 73
Lent by the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Ixelles

Edgard TYTGAT Brussels 1879 – Brussels 1957

Apprenticed as a watchmaker and then as a lithographer in Bruges. Studied at the Brussels academy. In 1907 he married Maria Demesmaeker who became his muse and modelled for him. Was friends with Rik Wouters. In 1914 he moved to London where he devoted himself to illustration. He returned to Belgium in 1920. He was a prolific artist in painting and engraving and his work reflects his pleasure in the scenes of daily life. The same spirit is reflected in his illustration of legends where drawing like that of an 'image d'Epinal' is joined to a delicate sense of colour.

60 The sad exile 1915
Canvas, 18⅞ x 15 / 48 x 38
Private collection

Albyn or **Binus VAN DEN ABEELE** Laethem – St Martin 1835 – Laethem-St Martin 1918

Landscape painter, who also wrote novels in Flemish. Successively burgomaster and town clerk of Laethem and of Afsné. Subjects confined to views of his local countryside; the time of day, the season and the atmosphere are carefully recorded. His work influenced Valerius de Saedeleer.

61 Edge of the forest at Laethem 1914–15
Canvas, 30¾ x 39 / 78 x 99
Lent by Herman van den Abeele, Laethem

Fritz VAN DEN BERGHE Ghent 1883 – Ghent 1939

Son of a librarian at the University of Ghent, he attended the Ghent academy. In 1905 settled at Laethem where he became the spiritual head of the second Laethem group which included the brothers De Smet, Constant Permeke and Servaes. Taught at the Ghent academy. In Holland during the first world war, where he joined forces with De Smet. Settled in Ghent in 1925. Van den Berghe had the most intellectual outlook of the artists of the Laethem group and was the most introspective. Following a post-Impressionist period he became an Expressionist during his stay in Holland, his style at times closely resembling that of his friend, Gustave de Smet. Came under Surrealist influence towards 1927 and in his last canvases, of which some are masterly, he painted a hallucinatory world.

62 The little Eve 1904
Canvas, 29½ x 25⅝ / 75 x 65
Lent by Léo S. Van de Ghinste, Brussels

Henry Clemens VAN DE VELDE Antwerp 1863 – Zürich 1957

Came from a middle-class family and was attracted to the arts at an early age. Began as a painter, working first in the Barbizon style and then in that of the neo-Impressionists. Studied at the academy in Antwerp and then with Carolus Duran in Paris. On his return to Belgium he took part in the foundation of the Antwerp circle, *Als ik Kan*, then joined the *Groupe des XX*. About 1893, under the influence of William Morris and his teachings, he gave up painting and devoted himself to applied art. In 1895 he had a house built at Uccle, near Brussels, entirely planned and furnished according to his designs. From 1899 to 1917 he worked in Germany, building houses in various towns, carrying out the interior decoration of the Folkwang Museum in Essen (1898–1902) and building the theatre of the Werkbund in Cologne (1914). He was also head of the Weimar art school and art adviser of Wilhelm Ernst, Grand Duke of Weimar. Subsequently, he lived in Switzerland (1917–21) and Holland (1921–25). On his return to Belgium he was appointed professor at Ghent University and founded the Cambre school, of which he remained principal until 1938. His chief works during this time were the Library of Ghent University (1936) and the Kröller-Müller Museum at Otterlo (1937–54). Spent the last years of his life in Switzerland. Besides his work as architect and decorator, he designed furniture, silver and cutlery, textiles, wallpapers and bookbindings. He was one of the founders of the Flemish *avant garde* revue *Van Nu en Straks* (1890) and worked on the production of the first numbers, the typographical success of which is due to him. He also lectured and wrote extensively on architecture and design theory.

63 Woman at the window
Canvas, 43¾ x 49¼ / 111 x 125
Lent by the Musée Royal des Beaux-Arts, Antwerp

See also Decorative art section, Cat. nos. 80–82

Théo VAN RYSSELBERGHE Ghent 1862 – Saint-Clair, France 1926

Son of a contractor and with architect brothers, he grew up in an atmosphere sympathetic to the arts. He studied at the academies of Ghent and Brussels. His first works are monochromatic but his palette lightened in the course of a journey to Spain and Morocco. Seurat's *Grande Jatte*, which he saw in Paris, had a decisive influence on him. He adopted a neo-impressionist technique, which he was the only painter to apply to portraiture. After 1900 his touch broadened and he sought 'to bring out the relief, to convey the form more forcefully'. Van Rysselberghe was one of the founders of the *Groupe des XX*, with whom he exhibited regularly, and with the group's successor, *La Libre Esthétique*. After 1895 he was associated with Van de Velde's crusade for a revolution in the applied arts. He designed posters, furniture, jewellery and typographical ornament, notably for books by Verhaeren, of whom he was a close friend. In 1898 he moved to Paris and subsequently to Provence.

Plate 1
64 Portrait of Octave Maus 1885
Canvas, 38⅝ x 29½ / 98 x 75
Lent by the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels

65 Summer in the garden
Canvas, 38⅝ x 51¼ / 98 x 130
Lent by the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Ixelles

66 The reading 1903
Canvas, 67 x 92 / 170 x 234
Lent by the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Ghent

Emile Verhaeren reading his poems surrounded by the following: from left to right, seated: Félix Le Dantec, Francis Vielé-Griffin, Henri-Edmond Cross (back view), André Gide, Maurice Maeterlinck; standing: Félix Fénéon and Henri Ghéon.

See also Decorative art section, Cat. no. 77

Gustave VAN DE WOESTIJNE Ghent 1881 – Brussels 1947

Attended the academy in Ghent. In 1899 founded, with his brother, the poet Karel van de Woestijne, and Georges Minne the first artists' colony at Laethem-St Martin. Gustave was strongly affected by Symbolist ideas through his brother's literary connections and Minne's friendship with Maeterlinck. He took refuge in England during the 1914–18 war, and settled at Malines on his return to Belgium. He was principal of the academy there from 1925 to 1939 and later taught at the school of applied arts in Brussels and the academy in Antwerp. His painting is often religious in inspiration but he also painted landscapes and portraits. He treated painting, whatever the subject, as a sacred task.

67 The cripple 1917
Canvas, 80¾ x 67 / 205 x 170
Lent by the Musée de Deinze (property of the Belgian Government)

Guillaume VOGELS Brussels 1836 – Ixelles 1896

Painter of landscapes, seascapes, still-lifes and flowers. Self-taught. Over forty before he was suddenly recognised as a great easel painter. Proprietor of a firm, *Peinture et Decoration*, in which he took an active part. Became friendly with the painter Pantazis, who joined his commercial business as soon as he arrived in Brussels. Founder-member (1884) of *Les XX*. Painter of rain-soaked streets and plains, of trees torn and twisted by squalls, of mist, snow, pink and leaden skies, wet and hazy public squares. Impressionist technique whose apparent simplicity conceals accomplished craftsmanship, where often a few brush strokes 'as violent as sword blows' sharply express the impression received.

68 Dusk over the pond
Canvas, 40¼ x 57½ / 102 x 146
Lent by the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels

69 Mist
Watercolour, 9⅜ x 6¾ / 24·5 x 17
Lent by the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels

70 Dusk over the pond
Watercolour, 7¼ x 13¼ / 18·5 x 33·5
Lent by the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels

Rik WOUTERS Malines 1882 – Amsterdam 1916

His father was a sculptor and it was to wood-carving that Wouters devoted his early years. Took drawing lessons at Malines academy, then at Brussels. In 1905 he married Nel, who became his model, and settled in Brussels. He was one of the group of so-called 'Brabançon Fauves'. Visited Paris and became enthusiastic about the French Impressionists and post-Impressionists, especially Renoir and Cézanne. Mobilised in 1914, interned in camps in Holland and released on grounds of ill-health. He died blind in Amsterdam in 1916, after undergoing several surgical operations to his face. Draughstman, sculptor and painter, Wouters produced masterpieces of contemporary Belgian art during a few years. His painting, which reflects sunshine and *joie de vivre*, takes on a more tragic note in the last years when his illness had its effects.

Plate 6
71 Woman ironing 1912
Canvas, 42¼ x 48½ / 107 x 123
Lent by the Musée Royal des Beaux-Arts, Antwerp

72 Summer afternoon in Amsterdam 1915
Canvas, 33½ x 40½ / 85 x 102
Private collection, Brussels

Posters

Lent by M. and Mme Wittamer, Brussels

Adolphe CRESPIN Brussels 1859 – Brussels 1944

Studied at the academy at Brussels and worked with Bonnat in Paris. On his return he concentrated on the applied arts, including theatre décor, tapestry designs, etc., as well as the graphic media.

73 'Tennants-Airs' (Revue Universitaire) 1898
Colour lithograph, 48 x 37 / 122 x 94

G. COMBAZ 1869–1941

Scholar, teacher, painter, musician and sculptor. Wrote several books on art and archaeology.

Plate 10b
74 'La Libre Esthétique' 1899
Colour lithograph, 28¾ x 17 / 73 x 43

Henri MEUNIER Brussels 1873 – Brussels 1922

Received his early artistic training from his father and later studied with Blanc-Garin. Engraver, bookbinder and poster designer.

75 'Editions Dietrich' 1898
Colour lithograph, 29¾ x 37½ / 75·5 x 95·5

André RASSENFOSSE Liège 1862 – 1934

Painter, engraver and poster designer. Follower of Félicien Rops.

76 'Cycles et Automobiles' 1897
Colour lithograph, 40 x 28½ / 102 x 72

Théo VAN RYSSELBERGHE

77 'La Libre Esthétique' 1897
Colour lithograph, 34½ x 26½ / 87 x 67

Ceramics, bronzes, jewellery, etc.

Alfred William FINCH

78 Large dish 1896
Glazed earthenware, diam. 14⅝ / 37·3
Lent by the Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels

79 Bottle with long narrow neck 1900–6
Earthenware, enamelled, h. 10½ / 26·8
Lent by the Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels

Henry VAN DE VELDE

80 Ornament of fruit 1892
Pastel, 86½ x 55 / 220 x 140
Lent by the Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo

Plate 11a
81 Candlestick 1900
Silver plate, 22⅞ x 20 / 58 x 51
Lent by the Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels

82 Candlestick 1900
Silver plate, 22⅞ x 20 / 58 x 51
Lent by the Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels

Philippe WOLFERS 1858–1929

Received his early training as a jeweller in the workshops of his father and also began to make sculpture. In 1892 he made his first designs for modern jewellery based on new forms developed from plant studies. He used baroque pearls and beautiful stones, often uncut when the colour pleased him. Besides his activity as a jeweller he continued to make sculpture and design decorative schemes, and exhibited at all the more important *salons* of the period.

83 Large vase 'Poppies' 1895
17¾ x 8¾ / 45 x 22
Lent by Marcel Wolfers, Vieusart

84 Belt buckle 'Peacock's feather' 1898
Lent by Maison Wolfers Frères, Brussels

85 Pendant 'Charmeuse' 1899
Lent by Maison Wolfers Frères, Brussels

Plate 11b
86 Jewel case 1899–1902
Ivory and silver surmounted by a peacock
16½ x 11¾ x 8 / 42 x 30 x 20·2
Lent by the Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels

87 Pendant 'Freesia' 1901
Lent by Maison Wolfers Frères, Brussels

88 Jardinière 'Golden pheasants' 1906
Silver, 7 x 12⅝ / 18 x 32
Lent by Marcel Wolfers, Vieusart

Photographs

Paul HANKAR Frameries 1859 – Brussels 1901

Studied architecture at the academy in Brussels. Was also an archaeologist and secretary of the archaeological society of Brussels. Designed many houses of which a number still exist, principally in Brussels.

House in the rue Defacqz 1897

Victor HORTA Ghent 1861 – Brussels 1947

Studied at the Ghent academy in Paris from 1878 to 1880, and then at the academy in Brussels with Alphonse Balat. Built his first houses in Ghent in 1886. After 1889 introduced the use of iron into domestic architecture. Largely created and developed the Art Nouveau style in building and decoration, using the characteristic curve in the structure and decoration of the many houses he designed in the last decade of the nineteenth century. His *Maison du Peuple* in Brussels (1896–99) is one of the most important buildings of the style and period. Following a visit to the United States he returned to a purer and more classical conception. Taught at the free University of Brussels and at the academy of which he was principal from 1927 to 1931. Also wrote extensively about his aesthetic theories.

La Maison du Peuple 1896–99
L'Hotel Solvay 1895–1900

Henry VAN DE VELDE

Furniture
Clothes *c.*1896

Documents and books

Among the documents and photographs included in the exhibition are the following:

Letter from Heymans to O. Maus, of 19 December 1886, proposing the participation of the young Van de Velde in the *Salon des XX*.

Series of photographs of Emile Claus in England during the 1914–18 war.

Letter from W. Finch to O. Maus, of 17 November 1886, proposing the election of Whistler as a member of *Les XX*.

Series of photographs relating to Khnopff, showing his sister posing as model for various works by the artist.

Letter from Ensor to O. Maus, of 1886, violently opposing the admission of Whistler to membership of *Les XX*.

Letter from Ensor to O. Maus, of 1889, with a drawing representing Death leading a man by the hand. *Repr. plate 10a.*

Original design by Van Rysselberghe for a poster for the 1897 exhibition of *La Libre Esthétique*.
See also Cat. no. 77.

Letter from Evenepoel to Charles Didisheim, of 10 December 1899. The artist's last letter.

Lent by the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, Archives of contemporary art, from the collections of Octave Maus (gift of A. van der Linden), Cahen, Didisheim, Thibaut de Maisière, J. André, Louveignée, Wodan, Tytgat, De Carnière.

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